



ARTIST'S SKETCH of Etienne Provost (also spelled Provost and Proveaux), trapper - explorer who came into Utah and camped on the shores of Utah Lake in 1824. It is for him that Provo and Provo River are named.

What of Utah History In the Pre-Mormon Period 1776-1847?

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From 1776 until about 1820 the gaps are large indeed. We have documented evidence of only two journeys of white men into what is now Utah (it didn't become known by that name until Congress created the Territory of Utah on Sept. 9, 1850). They were both by Spaniards, coming up from the New Mexico area the same as Dominguez and Escalante. An aged Spaniard named Mestas traced stolen horses (stolen by Indians) over the old Spanish Trail from New Mexico to Timpanogos Village (on or near Utah Lake) in 1805. In 1813 traders Mauricio Arza and Lagos Garcia came into Utah trading for peltry and Indian slaves. How far up they came appears uncertain. In subsequent years it is possible that unnamed Spaniards found crossings of the Colorado and began bringing horses and mules from California across the southern part of the Great Basin (southern Utah) into New Mexico. And it is possible they came farther north. We don't know because no one wrote it down, at least where anybody has been able to find it. History is what gets written down and left to be discovered later.

But about 1820 the era of the mountain man (fancy term for trapper) began in what is now Utah — and from there until the coming of the Mormons we have a fairly consistent, mostly documented record of what occurred. Coincident with the mountain men came army surveyors and explorers, who left us our most complete record. Captain John C. Fremont, who wears the deserved title of "The Pathfinder," first came into Utah in 1843 and again in 1845, leaving detailed reports and maps which the Mormons utilized (according to Mormon historian B.H. Roberts) when they came west.

Perhaps the earliest was Donald McKenzie, a British trapper with Hudsons' Bay, who came into northeast Utah (beyond the Uintah Basin area) in 1819. He may have been in Utah or Wyoming, we're not certain. The next year, 1820, he held a peace treaty with the Indians in the Bear Lake country, which could have been either Utah or Idaho.

Jim Bridger floated down Bear River from Cache Valley in a bull boat to Great Salt Lake in 1824 (some accounts put it 1825). Etienne Provost, (or Provot, or Proveaux, according to early spellings) came into Utah and camped on the shores of Utah Lake in 1824. The eminent historian LeRoy Hafen says he believes Provost may have seen Great Salt Lake before Bridger, but he cannot document it.

Peter Skene Ogden, another Hudsons' Bay Britisher, came into Utah in 1825 from the north, penetrating as far as what became known as Ogden's Hole, now Huntsville. The city of Ogden bears his name, but he went back across the mountains north, never coming down Ogden Canyon to the site of his namesake. Thus, he never saw the site of Ogden, although Huntsville is pretty close to it.

Jedediah Smith, reputed to be a bible - carrying Methodist, was the first white man to traverse Utah from north to south and east to west in epic journeys beginning 1826 and taking him to California and back.

Miles Goodyear, an American trapper and wandering mountain man, became Utah's first permanent settler. He established a homesite near the mouth of Weber Canyon in 1845 (some give the date earlier) calling it Fort Benaventura. He lived there until the Mormons came and sold it to them in late 1847 for \$1950. He thus firmly established claim to the title of Utah's first permanent settler.

John C. Fremont's historic and significant exploring and mapping expeditions into Utah in 1843 - 44, and again in 1845, gave us our first really accurate, scientific data on the region. His first journey's report was published by order of the U.S. Senate, and Brigham Young and his leaders had copies of it, including a detailed map of the Great Salt Lake area made by Fremont's mapmaker, a man named Pruess, a skilled mapmaker for his day.

According to Utah historian Gustive O. Larson, "the Mountain Men swarmed over the Uintah and Wasatch Ranges..." from about 1820 until the era of the trapper ended, and many of them were here prior to 1847. How many? We have no way of accurately knowing. A clue is the sign just out of Logan which says that a fur rendezvous was held there in the mid - 1820s attended by at least 100 trappers. Were there more? Possibly, but we'll never know — because no statistical minded trapper ever wrote it down.